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A Q-ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING

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Perception of Advertising
Advertising Education
Criticism of Advertising
Regulation of Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Eighty college students were administered twenty-six Likert-type statements designed to measure their attitudes toward advertising along four different dimensions: (1) economic effects of advertising, (2) social effects of advertising, (3) ethics of advertising, and (4) regulation of advertising. Analysis of the responses revealed five clusters or "types" of individuals based on their attitudes. While all five types exhibited some negative feelings toward advertising the degree of, and basis for, their criticisms varied considerably. Findings such as these indicate the need for a better understanding of the reasons for student dissatisfaction with the activities of the advertising community and a more comprehensive program for the dissemination of information about advertising and its activities to a wider cross-section of the college student body.

A Q-ANALYSIS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS ATTITUDES TOWARD ADVERTISING

INTRODUCTION

In attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of current advertising instruction and to find ways in which to improve it, it becomes essential to gain insights into the opinions and attitudes of college students toward advertising. Not only do we need to know what students of advertising think of the profession, but we also need to know what their peers in other areas think of it in order to better understand the types of questions these students may raise concerning the social and economic effects of advertising.

While a review of the literature indicates that this type of research has been conducted, it also reveals that these studies are sporadic rather than continual and ongoing. Therefore, in many cases, we may be making decisions concerning advertising education on the basis of obsolete data. Studies such as the ones conducted by Larkin (1), Lutz (2), Haller (3) and others provide valuable insights into the changes in student attitudes toward advertising, but do not always provide a continuous reflection of these attitudes. Nor do they always take full advantage of the advances in methods of analysis which are designed to provide better insights into underlying factors which may be overlooked using less sophisticated methods.

METHODOLOGY

The following study has been designed to provide some current insights into the opinions and attitudes of college students toward advertising, and to attempt to determine the underlying factors which may account for the similarities and differences in these attitudes.

A questionnaire containing twenty-six statements concerning advertising were formed into five-point Likert scales ranging from Strongly Agree, to Strongly Disagree. These statements were designed to elicit information concerning four attitudinal areas: (1) economic effects of advertising, (2) social effects of advertising, (3) ethics of advertising, and (4) regulation of advertising. The statements used to elicit this information are listed by category in Table 1.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The statements were administered to eighty subjects selected from a lecture class comprised of over 200 students at a large midwestern university. The course was selected because of the divergent backgrounds of the students enrolled in it. Ages ranged from seventeen to fifty-five years and areas of academic interested from journalism to pre-med, while grade in college ranged from freshman to graduate student. Table 2 provides a demographic analysis of the respondents.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Q-analysis was used to gain insights into the student's attitudes toward advertising. This type of factor analysis provides information concerning the ways in which individuals cluster on certain attitudinal dimensions which

can then be used as the basis for describing the ideas which they hold in common, and as a means of differentiating them from other clusters of individuals.

FINDINGS

On the basis of the responses of the eighty respondents to the twenty-six advertising related statements a total of five factors were extracted accounting for 65% of the total variance. Of the eighty subjects 45 loaded on factor 1, 8 loaded on factor 2, 7 on factor 3, 9 on factor 4, and 11 on factor 5. A profile of each of these types reveals the following similarities and differences.

Factor Type 1 Characteristics. The forty-five individuals clustering on this factor are identified as anti-advertising in their attitudes. They perceive advertising as both anti-social in its activities and as uneconomic. They tend to agree that advertising is "untruthful," and that it is "exaggerated." They also disagree with statements that advertising is "truthful," or that it "results in lower prices," or "better products," or that it "helps raise our standard of living." Table 3 shows the statements with which these individuals most strongly agreed and disagreed.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Factor Type 2 Characteristics. The eight individuals clustering on this factor have mixed feelings about advertising. On the one hand they feel that advertising is essential to our economic prosperity and that it is not having any serious anti-social effects or that the government needs to increase regulation of advertising, but they do feel that advertising is untruthful and is often silly or ridiculous and should be more realistic in the claims made.

Table 4 shows the statements with which this group most strong agreed and disagreed.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

Factor Type 3 Characteristics. The seven individuals clustering on this factor also have mixed feelings about advertising, but their predominant concern is with the perceived anti-social effects it is having on our society. They feel, for example that advertising is "making us materialistic," and that it is "causing people to buy things they don't need." However, they also feel that it is "essential to our economic prosperity" and is "helping to raise our standard of living," and "results in better products" for the consumer. The statements with which these individuals most strongly agree and disagree are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

Factor Type 4 Characteristics. The nine individuals who clustered on this factor are the most anti-advertising of all of the subjects in this study. They feel advertising is not only economically unsound in that it "increases the cost of goods," but that it also is socially detrimental in that it is "untruthful" and is used to promote harmful products. They therefore feel that there is definitely a need for "more government regulation of advertising." The statements with which these individuals most strongly agree and disagree are shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Factor Type 5 Characteristics. The eleven individuals who clustered on this factor are nearly as critical as those in Type 4. While they admit that advertising may be essential to our economic prosperity it is "untruthful," "silly and ridiculous," "insulting to the consumers intelligence," and "causes people to buy things they don't need." In addition they also feel that "advertising increases the cost of goods." However, they do not go so far as to advocate a need for "less advertising," or an increase in "government regulation." The statements with which these individuals most agree and disagree are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE

In an effort to determine whether demographic characteristics could be used to predict attitudes toward advertising the characteristics of the individuals in each factor type were examined. No significant relationships could be found to exist between age, grade in school, sex or college major and the attitudes held. For example, the seven students who indicated they were advertising majors were distributed across four of the five factors, with 2 loading on factor 2; 3 on factor 3; and one each on factors 4 and 5.

Summary of Advertising Types. It can be seen from the profiles of the five types of individuals outlined in the preceding that there are strong similarities between them on the basis of their responses to the advertising statements. First they are all critical of advertising and feel that it is not performing at or near their level of expectation. They are all in agreement on four statements (or concenus items) from the list of 26 statements to which they responded; 1. Advertising persuades people to buy things they don't need or shouldn't buy; 2. There is too much exaggeration in advertising; 3. Advertising should be more realistic; and 4. Too much of today's

advertising attempts to create a trivial or imaginary difference between products that are actually identical or very similar in composition.

However, despite these similarities in their attitudes there are distinct differences between the types and the degree to which they hold negative opinions toward advertising. For example, while the majority of these respondents (45) feel that advertising has little redeeming value either socially or economically and that it is too untruthful and exaggerated, the remainder of the respondents (35) hold less negative views of advertising. The 8 individuals in Type 2, for example, agree that advertising is too silly and ridiculous and may be untruthful and unrealistic, but they also believe that it is essential to our economy is socially acceptable and that government should not interfere with its activities. The 7 individuals in Type 3 also feel that advertising is economically and socially necessary, that it helps raise our standard of living and that it results in better products for the public. However, they also feel that advertising is too persuasive, is too bent on making us materialistic and in some cases may encourage us to buy products which are not in our best interest.

While Type 4 looks much like Type 1 in its total rejection of advertising as untruthful and uneconomically sound, they do not believe that there should be less advertising nor do they feel that there is too much sex in advertising or that it insults the intelligence. And, while Type 5 looks much like Type 2 in that they find advertising essential if somewhat over-persuasive they do not feel that the government should interfere in advertising activities nor do they feel that there should be a ban on advertising of dangerous products.

From the foregoing it appears that while on the surface students have very anti advertising attitudes, it can be seen that they do so for very

different reasons--some of which include a basic favorable attitude toward advertising in general, but a negative attitude toward some of the specific activities of advertisers and their advertisements.

COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the foregoing study it seems evident that the basis for student attitudes toward advertising are much more complex than may be apparent on the surface. While all of the types of individuals revealed by this study hold some degree of negative attitudes toward advertising the degree and direction of these attitudes differs significantly for each group.

What may be needed to improve advertising education in the future is: (1) a more thorough and comprehensive program of information concerning the social and economic effects of advertising so that advertising students can better answer the questions raised by their peers, and (2) a broader and more comprehensive program designed to inform non-advertising majors of these areas of interest.

TABLE 1. STATEMENTS BY ATTITUDINAL CATEGORY

ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING

Advertising is essential to the prosperity of our economy.

Advertising helps raise our standard of living.

Advertising results in better products for the public.

In general advertising results in lower prices.

Advertising increases the cost of goods and services.

Advertising fosters monopolies.

Advertising is wasteful since it only transfers sales from one manufacturer to another without actually adding any new money to the economy.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING

Advertising often persuades people to buy things they really don't need or should not buy.

Most advertising insults the intelligence of the consumer.

There is a crying need for better taste in most of today's advertisements.

Advertisements should be more realistic.

Too many of today's advertisements are silly and ridiculous.

Advertising should be on a more adult level.

Advertising just tends to confuse people by presenting them with a bewildering choice of items and claims.

Advertising is making us a nation of conformists.

Advertising is making us a materialistic people--interested in owning and getting "things."

ETHICS OF ADVERTISING

In general advertisements present a true picture of the product advertised.

There is a critical need for more truth in advertising.

Too much of today's advertising is false and misleading.

TABLE 1. STATEMENTS BY ATTITUDINAL CATEGORY (Continued)

ETHICS OF ADVERTISING (Continued)

There is too much exaggeration in advertising today.

There should be less stress on sex in advertising.

Too many of today's advertisements attempt to create a trivial or imaginary difference between products that are actually identical or very similar in composition.

REGULATION OF ADVERTISING

There should be less advertising.

There should be a ban on advertising of harmful or dangerous products.

There should be more government regulation of advertising.

TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

AGE OF RESPONDENTS		GRADE IN SCHOOL		COLLEGE MAJOR	
Age	No.	Freshman	3	Advertising	7
17	2	Sophomore	44	Reporting	12
18	3	Junior	21	Public Relations	11
19	26	Senior	11	Professional Wrtg.	12
20	14	Graduate	1	Broadcasting	6
21	14			Film	7
22	5	MARITAL STATUS		Law	1
23	6	Married	13	Education	3
24	2	Single	66	Business	4
25-30	2			Political Sci.	4
30+	4	SEX		English	6
		Male	43	Pre-Dentistry	1
		Female	34	Geology	1
				Pre-Med	1
				Art	2
				Home Econ.	1
				Unclassified	1

TABLE 3. ADVERTISING STATEMENTS MOST AGREED AND DISAGREED WITH BY TYPE 1 INDIVIDUALS

STATEMENT	Z-SCORE
There is a critical need for more truth in advertising	1.17
There is too much exaggeration in advertising today	1.01
Advertising helps raise our standard of living	-1.26
Advertising results in better products for the public	-1.77
In general advertising results in lower prices	-2.06
In general advertisements present a true picture of the product	-2.50

TABLE 4. ADVERTISING STATEMENTS MOST AGREED AND DISAGREED WITH BY TYPE 2 INDIVIDUALS

STATEMENT	Z-SCORE
There is a critical need for more truth in advertising	1.32
Too many of today's advertisements are silly and ridiculous	1.21
Advertising is essential to the prosperity of our economy	1.02
Advertisements should be more realistic	1.01
There should be less advertising	-1.44
Advertising is making us a nation of conformists	-1.48
Advertising just tends to confuse people by presenting them with a bewildering hoice of items and claims	-1.52
There should be more government regulation on advertising	-1.54
Advertising fosters monopolies	-1.87
Advertising is socially wasteful since it only transfers sales from one manufacturer to another and does not actually add any new money to the economy	-1.90

TABLE 5. ADVERTISING STATEMENTS MOST AGREED AND DISAGREED WITH BY TYPE 3 INDIVIDUALS

STATEMENT	Z-SCORE
Advertising is making us a materialistic people--interested in owning and getting "things"	1.32
There should be a ban on advertising of harmful or dangerous products	1.28
Advertising is essential to the prosperity of our economy	1.21
Advertising often persuades people to buy things they really don't need or shouldn't buy	1.18
Advertising helps raise our standard of living	1.13
Advertising results in better products for the public	1.13
There should be more government regulation of advertising	-1.16
Advertising just tends to confuse people by presenting them with a bewildering choice of items and claims	-1.25
There should be less advertising	-1.57
Advertising is socially wasteful since it only transfers sales from one manufacturer to another and does not actually add any new money to the economy	-1.67
Television advertising is by far the worst form of advertising	-2.11

TABLE 6. ADVERTISING STATEMENTS MOST AGREED AND DISAGREED WITH BY TYPE 4 INDIVIDUALS

STATEMENT	Z-SCORE
There is a critical need for more truth in advertising	1.48
There should be a ban on advertising of harmful or dangerous products	1.44
Advertising increases the cost of goods and services	1.30
There is a crying need for better taste in most of today's advertising	1.06
There should be more government regulation of advertising	1.02
Advertising should be on a more adult level	-1.35
There should be less stress on sex in advertising	-1.50
There should be less advertising	-1.63
Most advertising insults the intelligence of the consumer	-1.66
In general advertisements present a true picture of the product	-1.70

TABLE 7. ADVERTISING STATEMENTS MOST AGREED AND DISAGREED WITH BY TYPE 5 INDIVIDUALS

STATEMENT	Z-SCORE
Advertising is essential to the prosperity of our economy	1.40
Advertising often persuades people to buy things they really don't need or shouldn't buy	1.23
Most advertising insults the intelligence of the consumer	1.16
Advertising increases the cost of goods and services	1.10
Too many of today's advertisements are silly and ridiculous	1.09
There is a critical need for more truth in advertising	1.00
Television advertising is by far the worst form of advertising	-1.08
Advertising is socially wasteful since it only transfers sales from one manufacturer to another without actually adding any new money to the economy	-1.19
There should be a ban on advertising of harmful or dangerous products	-1.28
In general advertising results in lower prices	-1.29
In general advertisements present a true picture of the product	-1.47
There should be less advertising	-1.49
There should be more government regulation of advertising	-1.96

FOOTNOTES

1. Larkin, Ernest F., "A Q-Analysis of Values and Attitudes Toward Advertising," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 48 (Spring 1971), pp. 68-72.

2. Lutz, Richard J., "Measurement and Diagnosis of Student Attitudes Toward A Career in Advertising," Journal of Advertising, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 1975), pp. 36-40.

3. Haller, Thomas F., "What Students Think of Advertising," Journal of Advertising Research, Vol. 14, No. 1 (February 1974), pp. 33-38.